

VZCZCXRO5217
OO RUEHDBU
DE RUEHMO #5516/01 3301112
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 261112Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5429
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 005516

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN POLITICS: THE PUTIN NATIONAL
CONVENTION

REF: MOSCOW 5433

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reason: 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The "For Putin" movement continued to percolate, with a November 21 gathering of five thousand supporters in a Moscow sports hall. The event --part U.S. political party convention, part CPSU congress-- featured an extended attack by Putin on his political opponents, a swipe at the West, and a soundtrack from the Soviet era, which provoked ironic, and occasionally venomous, commentary in the media. The week also saw Putin endeavor to enlist the Russian Orthodox Church in his get-out-the-vote (for United Russia) drive. Next on the President's campaign schedule will be a November 26 campaign visit to St. Petersburg and an appeal to the nation, which is allegedly already taped and scheduled for broadcast on November 29. In the meantime, the Supreme Court rebuffed opposition party SPS's efforts to de-list Putin for allegedly campaigning for United Russia during work hours. SPS's repeat appeal was rejected by the Supreme Court on November 24. At a meeting on November 23, SPS determined that Boris Nemtsov would be its candidate for President. Other Russia/SPS demonstrations to be reported septel. End summary.

The Putin National Convention

¶2. (C) The "For Putin" movement bussed about five thousand supporters and a limited media contingent to the Luzhniki sports complex November 21 for a speech by the objection of its affection, President Putin. The media reported (Embassy was denied permission to attend) that Putin obliged with a speech that recounted his administration's achievements and attacked those who want to undermine Russia. Putin rehearsed for the crowd the progress made on his watch: Russia's territorial integrity was restored, international terrorism was repulsed, Russia joined the world's leading economies, per capita income increased, birth rates went up, all international debts were paid off, and infrastructure and housing improved. The course chartered by the government must be continued, however, and only United Russia can accomplish that although, Putin acknowledged, "(United Russia) is not the ideal political tool" for that task."

¶3. (SBU) The second half of Putin's speech featured a blistering attack on Russia's internal enemies, with occasional swipes at their external "handlers." Although no names or parties were mentioned, it was clear that Putin had Yabloko, SPS and, to a much lesser degree, the Communists in his sights. He accused the lot of corruption, of bringing the country to its knees in the '90s, and of cynicism. The leaders of Yabloko and SPS, he noted in an aside, spend much of their time "begging" for help at foreign embassies. Excerpts from Putin's address became a staple of news broadcasts, with most of the speech re-broadcast in weekend news programs.

14. (SBU) Some media were quick to condemn the event as an exercise in political populism for a select few guests. Kommersant journalist Andrey Kolesnikov, in an unusually barbed article, described the forum as over-rehearsed and evoking little enthusiasm, even from Putin himself. The forum featured Soviet internationalist classics like "You, me, he, she; together we are one country. . .": a speech by Putin's schoolteacher, who described Putin as a "decent person who would not stay for a third term once he gave his word;" and words from a test pilot, who told the young people present to stop hanging around in bars and night clubs as a "time of spirituality has arrived." Kolesnikov likened the stage-managed event to an American party convention, and downplayed Putin's harsh rhetoric, which he thought was gauged to rouse those present to work harder for United Russia.

15. (SBU) Other journalists were quick to jump in. Moskovskiy Komsomolets's Andrey Minkin, in a front-page article entitled "The Silence of the Shashlik" offered his own version of Putin's accomplishments: he has eliminated elections to the Federation Council and for governor, removed the minimal voter turnout requirement, nixed the "against all" provision on ballots, and severely limited the subjects on which a national referendum can be held. The "silence" Minkin referred to is the cowed silence of Russians, which the President mistakes for agreement. Novaya Gazeta's Andrey Lipskiy followed suit in a November 22 article entitled "What Are They Afraid Of?" in which, keying on Putin's speech, he explored the causes of insecurity in the Administration about an election whose results are a foregone conclusion. Lipskiy concluded that the chief fear is voter apathy on election day.

MOSCOW 00005516 002 OF 003

The Church Signs On

16. (SBU) As noted reftel, Putin met November 19 with the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy, and used the occasion to remind those present that he is heading the United Russia list. Putin said he was "certain that Russian Orthodox citizens, like other citizens, would fulfill their civic duty and vote." Patriarch Aleksiy promised Putin that the Russian Orthodox Church would be a "reliable partner."

More Campaign Appearances

17. (U) Next on Putin's electoral schedule will be a November 26 trip to his native St. Petersburg, where he will take part, with Duma Chairman Gryzlov, who heads United Russia's list in that city, in a United Russia forum entitled "A Professional Team for the Country." The object of the exercise, which has been staged in other regions of the country, is to identify specialists who may be selected for positions in local and regional bodies of government. The forum will no doubt provide the President with an opportunity to campaign for United Russia on his home turf.

18. (SBU) On November 29, a short appeal by Putin is expected to be broadcast on national television. It is expected that, like his speech at Luzhniki, the appeal will describe his Administration's accomplishments and the dangers facing Russia, and ask voters to allow United Russia to continue the course charted by the President.

Supreme Court Backs Putin

19. (SBU) The beleaguered SPS party failed to make progress in its efforts to have Putin removed from the head of United Russia's party list for allegedly using his official position to campaign for his party. SPS accused Putin of crossing the line between President and candidate on two occasions:

during his speech (reftel) to road workers in Krasnoyarsk, and during his annual "open mike" question-and-answer session with Russian citizens. To no one's surprise, the Supreme Court followed the Central Election Commission in ruling that Putin's actions had been in accord with the law. As United Russia Deputy Vladimir Pligin summarized: "Due to the President's power and authority, he cannot be bound by restrictions on his activity." SPS contends that the first appeal was invalid as neither Putin nor his representatives appeared, and a telegram to Putin sent by the Court was returned to sender. SPS filed a repeat repeal, which was rejected by the Court on November 24.

¶10. (SBU) At a special session on November 23, SPS nominated its Federal list number two, Boris Nemtsov, as its presidential candidate. (Note: SPS Leader Nikita Belykh, at 32, does not meet the constitutionally decreed age requirement of 35.) SPS's decision is expected to be confirmed at a party congress scheduled for December 17.

SPS Joins With Other Russia

¶11. (SBU) SPS has also joined Other Russia's November 24 meeting in central Moscow (weekend events to be reported septel). SPS Chairman Belykh underlined that SPS will not formally join Other Russia's coalition and that, in protesting with Other Russia, SPS is not formally allying itself with Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party, which is a member of Other Russia. SPS's participation is intended to show, Belykh said, that it is a genuine opposition party.

Signs of the Campaign

¶12. (SBU) With the election only one week away, there is scant evidence of a campaign on the streets of Moscow. Communist Party campaign workers are distributing campaign literature at some of the city's metro stops, where they are occasionally joined by LDPR. United Russia seems to have virtually monopolized the city's key advertising locations. Enormous United Russia posters noting that Russia is "for Putin" front the Hotel Moskva at Red Square and at the end of Novyj Arbat street. United Russia banners line the bridge leading past the Kremlin in the direction of the Lenin Library. Voters are reminded to "check box number 10" (United Russia's place on the Federal list) by signs at bus stops and attached to telephone poles along the city's main thoroughfares. There are occasional SPS and LDPR billboards including, notably, one featuring SPS's Masha Gaidar just outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Communist Party

MOSCOW 00005516 003 OF 003

seems to have decided that such advertising is not worth the coin.

Comment

¶13. (C) With Putin's entry into the race on the side of United Russia, the suspense has been drained from the election. What interest remains is focused on United Russia's margin of victory and the number of parties that will cross the seven-percent threshold to Duma representation. Voter turnout, Kremlin support for, or opposition to, parties on the margins, and fiddling at the local level could combine to produce as few as two and as many as four parties in the new legislature. While the Kremlin seems to have expressed a preference for a multi-party Duma, and that seems the much more likely outcome at this juncture, a United Russia - Communist Party legislature cannot be excluded. With the Federation Council on November 26 having set March 2 as the date for the presidential elections (septel), the media's attention will inevitably begin to shift to the central question in this election season: Putin's successor.

BURNS